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March 28, 1996

Dear Luke:

I think I have a story which might interest you.

On March 19 as I was sitting here in retirement reading a book, my telephone rang and in the next few minutes 50 year old, and very dim memories were awakened in my brain. The voice on the line identified itself as "Danny Blaine", which initially meant nothing to me, but as he talked and told me who he was and what his call was all about I was absolutely flabbergasted! He tried somewhat in vain to jog my memory of names and places of 1944 and 1945, but I must admit most of the names he called out were not familiar. I knew Danny by another name while he was in the service and as he continued to talk a vision of the young guy I knew so many years ago began to take form.

For the first time since I was discharged from the service in April 1946 I learned from Danny that the old 103rd Cactus Division was still alive in "reunion form". As I told Danny, I thought the War Department had simply dumped all the old records of the 103rd into dead storage after de-activating it and that was it. Until Danny called, I hadn't heard from a soul in the old outfit. Our local paper occasionally list reunions of WW II outfits, but never anything on the 103rd.

As we talked, Danny told me that there exists a pretty active group from the 103rd and more importantly, that the next reunion is to be held 120 miles down the Interstate from me in Columbus, Ohio. He then gave me information on how to reach Betty Ellsworth whom I promptly called after Danny and I finished. Betty confirmed the information about the reunion and promised to send me material about it. That material arrived in today's mail. Your "Special Notice" caused me to dig out some dusty stuff in the basement to see if I had anything you might be interested in. I have made copies of a letter I wrote home to my parents one of which is enclosed. (By the way, I'm sending copies of this letter to you and my 1945 letter to Danny since he was in my same outfit and may remember some of the things I wrote about.)

I think some explanatory background is needed in regard to my 1945 letter. You will note that it was written after VE Day. The "news about the mail" I mentioned in the first paragraph refers to the lifting of censorship and we could write home and tell our stories. I cannot remember exactly where I was when I wrote the letter, but since my handwriting was barely legible (and still is!) and I had access to a typewriter, I typed it. I wrote that letter for two reasons: I could finally tell my family of my combat adventures, and, I wanted to record it before I forgot it all. As you probably have surmised, my folks saved EVERY letter I sent home from the service and I still have them all.

Allow me to explain my name(s). As you can see from my signature, my full name is Herman C. Giles, Jr. My entire life I have had several nicknames because through school I spent a lot of time defending the

name Herman. Back in 1945 I had the nickname of Ossie. This evolved into the name of Ozzie which has been shortened to Oz which many people now know me by. I dropped the "Junior" when my father died back in 1968.

I don't want to bore you with my whole "war story", but I think a little background will help explain some of the comments in my letter. My siblings consisted of two brothers of whom I am the youngest. My brothers had enlisted in the Air Corps (as it was known then) and were pilots. I wanted to make it a "threesome", so as I approached my 18th birthday I went to the Army Recruiting Office intending to enlist in the Army Air Corps. I was told that all such enlistments were "closed" at that time and that I should go ahead and be drafted. After getting my first permanent assignment I was to apply for transfer to the Air Corp Flight Training Program. My first assignment was to a place called Camp Blanding in Florida where I ended up in a Medical Aid Unit attached to a Field Artillery Battalion of the 66th Division. A VERY co-operative and friendly First Lieutenant doctor who was in charge of my unit was helpful in getting me my transfer. My Air Corps "career" was relatively short-lived because eventually me and several thousand like me found ourselves back in Infantry Divisions when the Air Corps discovered it "had enough pilots and the infantry needs cannon fodder". I was transferred to the 63rd Division in Camp VanDorn Mississippi and after a few weeks of basic training there I was again transferred to Camp Howze Texas and the 103rd. In my service career, I went through basic training FIVE TIMES!!! Do you think that might be a record?

Like most of us, I was not a hero in WW II. I feel very lucky and happy to have escaped alive. Who knows what would have happened had I become a pilot in the Air Corps. You will see in my letter that, again like most, I was not on the line very long. Trench foot caught up with me like many others and by the time the medics got done with me in hospitals, the war in Europe was over. Again like many others, I was never so happy as to see the results of the atomic bomb!

4/96
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Luke, your Special Notice is not clear what you intend doing with the material you collect, but if you think this 1945 letter to the parents of a scared 20 year kid will be of interest, you are welcome to use it as you see fit. I am going to try to make it to Columbus in September - the good Lord willing.

Best regards,

Herman C. Giles, Jr. "Oz"
2218 10th Street.
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44221
Phone 330-923-6232.



Co. "G", 411th Reg., 103rd Division

P.S. By the way, I was nothing but a PFC.

CC DANNY BLAINE

May 19, 1945.

Dear Folks:

We just got the good news about the mail so I'm starting off right now and telling all. I'll start at POE and work up to now so get set, here goes. * * * *

On Oct 6, 1944, I boarded an Italian ~~liner~~ liner by the name of USS Monticelo. The Italian name I can't remember but will check up later. We were joined somewhere off the east coast by approximately 11 or 12 other ships. Three divisions in all were in this convoy, the 100th, 103rd and I'm not sure but I think it was the 99th. About 10 days out we ran into some rough weather that the Navy personnel aboard said was the roughest they'd seen in a long time. On Oct. 20th we landed in Marseilles, France. After an 18 mile hike inland we pitched tents at what was known as a staging area. (Now the dates from now on I'm not sure of) My company stayed there about 5 or 6 days and then we moved down into town again to the dock area. Here we assembled jeeps that had just been unloaded from boats. It was here that I came down with chills and fever so they sent me to a hospital there. This was on Sunday, Oct. 31st. (I think). As I've told you before while I was in the hospital the division moved north to a rear assembly area at Epinal, France. Shortly after that they were committed in the area west of St. Die, France. After approximately 12 or 13 days in the hospital I was released to a replacement depot just outside of town. I was here for about a week during which time I had a good look at Marseilles. Incidentally the docks and port facilities there were just plainly blown to hell. When I stop to think of all the destruction I've seen over here I wonder if they'll ever get the place like it was before. But you know it's funny one shattered house or building looks no different than any of the others. They all look alike after you get used to them. Well anyway, after a week of looking over Marseilles I was put on 40 and 8 s and shipped north to Epinal. Epinal was the 7th army replacement depot. They are billeted in a large factory. I staid here another 4 or 5 days and finally the division needing some replacements badly sent trucks out to pick a bunch of us up. I finally rejoined my company at Barr, France, on or about Nov. 15th. I learned that my platoon leader, Lt. Wolff had been killed by a machine gun bullet in the head about 5 minutes after they started their first attack. There were others too but Lt. Wolff's death was most prominent. This was near the village of St. MARIE. From St. Marie my company fought through St. Die and 5 or 6 other towns and villages to Barr. At Barr they lost Lt. Snider, platoon leader of the 4th platoon and the First Sergeant plus 5 or 6 others killed and 15 or 20 wounded. They ran into an ambush there. The Germans had a flak gun set up there pointing down the road the company was coming down and waited until they were about 20 yards away before they opened up. The boys said the Jerries opened up on them from three sides and that they just turned around and ran like hell. It was the only thing they could do. I joined them the night after this ambush. The next day we moved into the town of Andlo about 2 or 3 miles from Barr. Here we cleared houses of snipers. That night we moved back to Barr and guarded regimental hqs. The next day we moved back through Andlo and into the next town of Epfig. We stayed here over night with no action, just an occasional shell. The next day we moved into the town of Selestat where I saw more of what war is like. There was a terrific fire fight on the other side of this town and as we were entering Jerry dropped in quite a few mortar and .88's. This scared hell out of me and I think I smoked a pack of butts in about three hours. We staid in this town over night with the orders to be ready to move out and relieve "I" company in case they wanted us to. It was evidently pretty rough going out there. Well, we didn't have to relieve them so next day the division was pulled off the line and we were trucked to the little town of Mittersheim (MITTERSHEIM).

We relieved the 45th division here. This was the action I described to you in one of my long letters from the hospital but I'll go over it again here. At 5 A.M. one morning we waited in a woods outside this town for an artillery barrage. Talk about fireworks on the 4th of July this took the cake. @ don't think I'll ever forget that morning. We were to jump off at 5:30 and for a half an hour from 5:00 to 5:30 we threw everything we had at them. Boy, the flashes and lights were actually beautiful although we knew they were tossing death and destruction. And the noise. I don't think there was anything that scared me more than to have so much hell being raised around me by our own artillery that we couldn't tell when something was coming in. Well, at 5:30 we ran across this blown out railroad bridge that the engineer had laid a plank across. Boy, that plank was just like a diving board and we had to be careful not to fall. We got over that O.K. and Jerry just tossed in about 3 or 4 88's. We then pushed on out over open country ready for anything. It was just getting light by this time but not light enough to see very good. Well, it was smooth sailing so we pushed on as fast as we could. We captured a couple of prisoners and pushed on. I don't know what broke us up but the first platoon and the first and second squads of the second- (mine) started going hell bent for some woods. We got in there O.K. but after we got in there we slowed down a little because we couldn't see very well. Finally we were way out ahead of everybody and man was the artillery coming in. We sent a runner back to the company for orders. He came back with the word that we had passed a ~~ap~~ phase line and were in our own artillery. You should have seen the dirt fly as we dug in. German artillery is bad but I just don't see how anybody can live through ours. That evening the rest of the company caught up with us and the C.O. told us we were to move out over the open ground on our left-front and take a town there. We did this without mishap or casualty but after we got in there we learned a lesson that we didn't forget. It seemed that "F" company moved in on the other side of this town and went into the first houses they came to. Well there were about 4 or 5 guys sitting in a room in one of these houses when a German stuck his rifle through the door and blasted away. He got one of the boys through the head and another through the arm and then he ran like hell. He got away. The reason this happened was that those boys didn't put out a guard. They took it for granted the village was clear. We learned a lesson there and from then on we made damn sure a town was clear before we bedded down for the night. Incidentally when that guy was shot in the head they gave him up for dead but next morning they couldn't believe it when he was breathing. They sent him back right and he lived. The next day we started out across country and ended up in some woods. It started raining and we staid out in it all day in those woods. That evening we started walking. Boy, we walked all over hell and back and finally ended up in some more woods. We were supposed to guard some tanks that were there. It rained all night there. The next morning we started out again and took the town of WORTH. We went on through there and on across country. That afternoon the sun came out and we dried up a little. We finally came to another town (I don't remember the name) and started to settle down there for the night when Jerry counterattacked with four tanks. All four were stopped by bazookas from the third ~~main~~ battalion on our right flank. When darkness came we started walking again. Boy, was I tired that night. If we'd stop for a minute or two my knees would give way underneath me and wake me up. While walking along a road that night we came upon a house with 25 or 30 Germans in it. They told us they were going to set a machine gun there for an ambush but we came before they expected us to. We left some boys there to guard them and pushed on to the town we had started out for. When we arrived there we found it pretty well crowded with Jerries. My battalion captured about 150 of them that night which at that time we thought was pretty good.

Well, after putting out a guard we tried to catch a little sleep. This was very easy for me to do because I was just plain pooped out. That morning (we got about an hour's sleep) we heard that Capt. Cowly our company commander had his leg half blown off by a mortar shell. That left us with one officer for the company. Well, that day we moved out of there and started climbing hills. We finally stopped and dug in for the night on top of one of them. They evidently thought it was pretty safe ~~fix~~ up there because we were allowed to build fires. The next morning we started walking again. This time we stopped close to a cross roads (still in the woods) and started digging in. Next thing we knew - wham!! - wham!! wham!! Jerry was zeroing in on the cross-roads. Some of the boys in the fourth platoon were hit here. Well, we all had our holes dug very deep and covered well and were ready to climb in our sacks when we were told to move out to the next town (Climbach). During the day some colored Tank Destroyer and some of the boys from E company 411 had quite a battle because it was written up in Yank magazine. We moved in here that night, posted guards and went to bed. The next morning we started up into the woods and hills again. We were pushing on into Germany and Jerry didn't want us there so they started throwing lots of stuff at us. We were up on top of a hill when they fired some mortars that were zeroed right in on us. Here I, because of fatigue, loss of sleep, etc. became a case of battle fatigue. I was sent back to the division clearing company with a system full of drugs and slept and slept. I was away from the company for about 5 days. During this time they pushed on into Germany and hit the Siegfried line. Where they hit it it was plenty tough. The company moved into some trenches that Jerry had dug so he knew the layout on them. Well, it seems that there were these trenches facing each other, we in one Jerry in the other. And not to our knowledge there was a connecting trench. Well Jerry knew this and he crawled down that and started throwing "egg" concussion grenades on the boys. That caused quite a few casualties and there were a lot more caused by some deadly accurate snipers. Well after the company had the hell pretty well beat out of it, regiment decided to relieve them and they were pulled back about a mile. I rejoined them again here. After this action the division was replaced by the 45th and we moved again to the vicinity of FORBACH. It was here where I got trench foot. Well, by this time it was getting plenty cold. "G" moved into the little town of FAUHLINGEN (I'm not sure of the spelling) and relieved the 6th Armoured. We did nothing here but hold a line. We did no attacking but we did have patrols going out nightly. I spent Christmas and New Year here and also my birthday. On about the 10th of January some brass hat wanted the line straightened out so we went into the attack to do same. The Jerries had other ideas. They pinned us down out in an open field and it was here that I came the closest to being hit. A guy laying about three feet on my right side was killed and I had my pants burned by a tracer bullet. They were firing machine guns at us and just spraying the ground. This guy was hit in the right shoulder, the back of the head and the left shoulder. Quite a few of the boys from the first platoon were captured. With God's help I crawled out of there. I'm telling you I layed there in that snow calling out loud to Him and I know He answered because I'm still living today. Well, the company withdrew from there and went back on a hill where we dug in for the night. It was during these next few days that really got my feet. It just got hellishly cold and we had to stay out in it. Finally on the 13th my feet were so bad I decided to go to the aid station to thaw them out. Well, they sent me back to the division clearing company where they at least dried off. They swelled up real big and I could hardly get

my shoes on. On the 14th I wrote you that letter in which I didn't say anything about my condition because I was expecting to go back up to the company in a couple of days. Well, a couple of days after that they decided to send me further back. All the time I never even thought I would go clear back to England. I was sent to the 11th Evacuation Hospital. It was there I think that they took my name and sent it to Washington and then to you. From the 11th I was sent to the 23rd General Hospital which I think was close to Epinal by hospital train. From there again by train I was sent to the 48th General in Paris. And again by train I was sent to the 164th General near Cherbourg. We had a delay here for about two weeks waiting for clear weather so we could fly the channel. Finally it looked pretty good so they loaded us up and took off. But when we got close to England it closed in and started raining. We then had to make an emergency landing at a field just in from the coast. They put us in the 11th Field Hospital there at the field to wait for clear weather so they could fly us further inland. Well, but that afternoon it had cleared up and they started loading up patients but they found that one of the pilots had gone into town because he thought it wouldn't clear up. That left 24 of us in that hospital that night. The next morning it was clear and they flew us on in. We stopped overnight at ~~xx~~ a station hospital. I forgot the number of it but we were just there overnight. The next morning we rode in ambulances to the 187th General Hospital about 15 miles from Andover England. I was there about three weeks and then they moved me to the 827 Convalescent Center which was about 5 miles the other side of Andover. You pretty well know the deal from there. After about a month and a half there I was discharged to duty, got a 7 day delay en route to London and on May 2nd reported to the 10th Replacement depot. After processing we were loaded on a train and sent to South Hampton. There we loaded on a boat and moved out into the middle of the harbor, dropped anchor and waited for darkness. But it fogged up that night and we didn't sail, but the next night (VE-day eve) we sailed. When I woke up next morning we were already tied up at LeHavre. We piled off the boat and hiked through town and up into some woods on the other side. Here we had to stay while everybody down in Le Havre raised merry hell for V-E day. The next day we packed up and piled on a train and came here. Incidentally we lived in tents there in the woods. The train brought us here and here I've been for about a week now. This is 82nd Replacement Bn. located near Fontoy France. About 20 miles south of the Luxembourg border. From here I'll probably go to the 7th Army Replacement Depot which at present I don't know the location and from there will rejoin the division.

Well, that's it. There are probably a million and one more things I could tell you about but this does it more than I have before. Now here are a few more things I could mention. We left camp Shanke in New York. During the trip over we had no trouble with subs or attacks of any kind. And I did mention that the division was committed on or about Nov. 5 or 6. (my company near ST. MARIE FRANCE.) Here are some other things that might interest you. At the time I left the line in January, Bill Clifford's 83rd division was right behind us and I think they were about ready to relieve us. And you might remember the ship that was sunk in the channel back in January I think it was. Well, the 264th Infantry regiment of the 66th division was on that boat!!

Here's a couple of other things that I could tell you censorship or no. I was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge on Dec. 31st but didn't know until the other day when I saw it in my service record. And according to my service record I've only got one battle star for the battle of Germany. And I've only got 37 points not 41.

Talk about writers' cramp I've really got it now. This book has taken me about 4 hours to write so I think I'd better wind up and hit the sack. I'll write again soon. So until next time then, All my love,
Ossie.